

Hobbs, NM – Thursday, Congressman Harry Teague announced that the Department of Veterans Affairs will issue new rules to ease the process for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to receive disability benefits. The regulations, which will take effect as early as Monday, will eliminate a requirement that veterans provide documentation of specific events like bomb blasts, firefights or mortar attacks that might have caused PTSD. Such requirements are often difficult to fulfill and can stymie legitimate claims for benefits. The new rules will affect hundreds of thousands of veterans and help to address the growing number of service members struggling with PTSD and other mental health issues after returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

“The men and women who fought to protect our country deserve the services they were promised and the best care that we can provide. That includes easy access to treatment and assistance for both physical wounds and the “invisible” mental health wounds, like PTSD,” said Harry Teague, New Mexico’s only member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee and founding member of the Congressional Invisible Wounds Caucus. “As our military commitments overseas continue, the physical, mental and emotional burden placed on our troops and returning veterans only continues to grow. This announcement will positively impact so many veterans suffering with the effects of PTSD and I applaud VA Secretary Shinseki on these new regulations.”

Veterans have struggled for decades to meet the requirements for PTSD benefits, arguing that finding such records is extremely time consuming and sometimes impossible. The new rule, which applies to veterans of all wars, will provide compensations to soldiers and veterans struggling with PTSD if they can simply show that they served in a war zone and in a job consistent with the events that they say caused their conditions without providing evidence of specific traumatic events. The new rule would also allow compensation for service members who had good reason to fear traumatic events, known as stressors, even if they did not actually experience them.

Congressman Teague has made veterans’ issues a top priority, helping to secure advanced appropriations funding for the VA and introducing legislation aimed at addressing and reducing the impact of mental health issues like PTSD have on the lives of returning veterans. He led a bi-partisan group in forming the Congressional Invisible Wounds Caucus, to promote awareness of and solutions for the mental health challenges facing our service members and veterans. He

was recognized by the Coalition for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans for his leadership on the mental health of our veterans and service members. Recently, Teague led an inquiry in to treatment for Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) at Ft Bliss and across the military, following reports that soldiers returning from war with TBI have struggled with months long waits to be seen by a doctor, inadequate care, and major delays in the opening of Ft. Bliss' TBI Clinic. Teague also recently hosted a field hearing of the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) Health Subcommittee in Las Cruces, New Mexico to address the unique issues facing southern New Mexico's veterans.